

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

Sub
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1. In a online comparison system, a method of ranking prospective merchants comprising:

receiving information related to a potential consumer purchase;

5 receiving a plurality of merchant information data for a plurality of merchants capable of completing the potential consumer purchase, the merchant data for a merchant organized into a plurality of categories;

receiving a set of weighting factors, the weighting factors corresponding to the categories of merchant information data;

10 calculating a respective merchant data weight result based on the weighting factor as applied to the merchant data; and

ranking merchants based on the aggregate of the weighting factors for a given merchant in comparison to the aggregate of weighting factors.

15 2. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

requesting information from a consumer relating to a potential consumer purchase.

3. The method of claim 2, further comprising:

providing the ranking to the consumer in response to the consumer's response to the request for information relating to a potential consumer purchase.

Sub B2 4. The method of claim 3, further comprising:

5 below a specified threshold excluding a merchant from the ranking when the merchant receives a aggregate score

5. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

requesting weighting factor information from a consumer; and

10 using the consumer entered weighting factor information in the calculation of the merchant data weight result.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein the weighting factors sum to a predetermined value.

7. The method of claim 5, wherein the weighting factors are balanced such that the weighting factors sum to a predetermined value.

15 8. The method of claim 7, further comprising:

providing a rating based on the relative difference in merchant aggregate scores.

9. The method of claim 7, further comprising:

20 providing a ranking to a consumer in response to the consumer's entering a product query.

54231 10. A system of providing comparisons between at least two products,
comprising:

means for receiving a search query for a product;

means for retrieving from a database information on merchants offering
to sell the product specified in the search query;

means for retrieving from a database comparison information relating to
the specified product and the merchants offering the specified product;

means for applying screening factors to the retrieved merchant and
product information to remove those merchants from the ranking which
correspond to the screening criteria;

means for applying weighting factors to the retrieved merchant and
product information;

means for calculating a merchant aggregate value from the application of
the weighting factors;

means for generating a ranking the merchants based on the merchant
aggregate value; and

means for providing the ranking to a consumer.

11. The comparison system of claim 10, further comprising:

means for presenting the weighting factors to the consumer;

means for providing the consumer with the ability to specify weights
associated with items of merchant and product information; and

means for using the weights in generating the ranking of merchants.

12. The comparison system of claim 10, further comprising:

